
Contextualising and Understanding Hybrid Warfare by Pakistan

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To fight and conquer in all battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking one's resistance without fighting.

—Sun Tzu

Introduction

The canvas of modern day conflict is diverse, with many interlinked or diverse dimensions, to include conventional conflicts (including nuclear adversaries), cyber, space, economic, use of terrorists, insurgents or religious extremism. The merging or blurring of conflicts and war forms is gradually transforming into a hybrid nature, wherein adversaries are likely to maximise the war-fighting capability at their disposal to include asymmetric or irregular tactics.¹

In the Indian context, there is a distinct regional dimension to the challenges faced, with two nuclear neighbours with unresolved border disputes. Both adversaries bring different capabilities to the table: while Pakistan is specialised in breeding and exporting religious terror, China, along with its conventional capabilities, specialises in cyber and non-

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contact warfare. Active borders, conflicts and collusion between these two neighbours further enhance the complexities and challenges for India. Unconventional, guerrilla or hybrid warfare is often considered a weapon of the weaker forces against a stronger adversary.²

Post abrogation of Article 370 and deterioration in Indo-Pak relations, Pakistan is running out of options and, therefore, would again attempt to activate, exploit and consolidate its hybrid resources. This is likely to manifest in activation of sleeper cells, surge in infiltration, fresh recruitment, recycling of some apprehended/surrendered terrorists and triggering of violent agitations in the hinterland of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). To predict and prepare for likely threats in the future, it is essential to understand and contextualise the hybrid warfare capabilities of Pakistan.³

Understanding the Hybrid Threat

Frank Hoffman, from the US Marine Centre of Emerging Threats and Opportunities, defines a hybrid threat as “a form of conflict in which state and non-state actors simultaneously exploit all modes—conventional, irregular, terrorists, disruptive or criminal to destabilise an existing order”.⁴ A hybrid threat is also defined as a “diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, and/or criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects”.⁵ Hybrid warfare, as defined by the hybrid doctrine of the UK, is referred to as “warfare conducted by irregular forces that have access to sophisticated weapons and systems normally fielded by regular forces. Hybrid warfare may morph and adapt throughout an individual campaign, as circumstances and recourses allow”.⁶

This warfare is, thus, the convergence of the physical and psychological, combatant and non-combatant, violence and nation-building, and kinetic and information approach. The most significant convergence is within the various modes of war. The key components of a hybrid threat, thus,

are the military, nation-state paramilitary force, terrorist groups, guerrilla units, criminal organisations and civil population, especially in view of J&K's agitational dynamics.⁷

Historical Perspective

In the global context, hybrid threats are not new. There are numerous examples of a 'weaker' adversary using its relative asymmetric strength against its stronger opponent's perceived weaknesses. Lawrence of Arabia, Changez Khan and the Afghan Wars are all testimony of this type of unrestricted war. The Viet Cong and People's Army of Vietnam combined irregular and regular forces into conventional and unconventional units in fighting the French and US forces. The Russian experiences in Afghanistan bear testimony to the efficient use of irregulars in both urban and rural environments to bring to its knees the might of an erstwhile superpower. Russia, too, offensively used hybrid warfare by employing cyber warfare against Georgia. Hezbollah mixed conventional capabilities (such as anti-armour weapons, rockets, and command and control networks) with irregular tactics (including information warfare, non-uniformed combatants, and civilian shielding). The result was a tactical stalemate and strategic setback for Israel.

In the Indian context, the *Arthashastra* explains the treatise on statecraft and conduct of unrestricted warfare which is defined as "concealed war" and "silent war", involving the use of assassins, insiders, informers and prostitutes aimed at winning battles against an adversarial king. Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh and Maharaja Ranjit Singh employed hybrid resources to achieve their political and military aims. During the 1971 campaign, the Mukti Bahini, an armed organisation comprising regulars and irregulars wherein regulars were defectors from East Pakistani units, was employed by India in Bangladesh and greatly assisted it in achieving its political and military aims.

In the specific context of Pakistan, it has since its creation, post independence and partition, treated India as its primary threat and enemy. Due to its inadequacy vis-à-vis India with regards to military and financial capability, it has historically exhibited its overdependence on irregulars and hybrid warfare. It employed them in 1947-48 to seize portions of J&K, with the battle for Srinagar by regular and irregular forces being a classical example. In 1965, the Razakars were employed by Pakistan as part of a carefully crafted strategy manifesting in the form of Op Gibraltar in the hill sector. During the Kargil misadventure in 1999, Pakistan employed a mix of terrorists and regular troops to occupy critical heights along the Line of Control (LoC). The unfolding of Op TOPAC over the last three decades with the aim to *bleed India through a thousand cuts* is also a typical manifestation of the hybrid strategy adopted by Pakistan.

Pakistan trained and inducted 80,000 Afghan Mujahideen for the collapse of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Its hand is seen in all terrorist actions perpetrated against India which include aid and abetment to the Sikh insurgency in Punjab; aid to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) movement in Assam; the ongoing virulent insurgency in Kashmir; cross-border infiltration; terrorist attacks in Indian cities; attack on the Indian Parliament; plane hijacking; attack across the LoC at Kargil; fake currency racket through Nepal; “Karachi project” to train Indian Mujahideen for committing acts of terror and sabotage in India; 26/11 attack in Mumbai in 2008; attack on the Indian Embassy in Afghanistan; and the Uri and Pulwama attacks. All these incidents establish the capability of the adversary to conduct intermittent acts of violence, sabotage and subversion at will against India.

Analysis of Hybrid Warfare by Pakistan

Pakistan, a country born out of hate, on religious faultlines and an ever growing tilt towards extremism has always been motivated exclusively by the twin forces of fundamentalism and intrinsic hatred towards India

throughout its existence. The evils of *jihadism* and terrorism have become Pakistan's state policy, especially focussed towards India and Afghanistan. It has earned the notoriety of being the epicentre of global terrorism and has been India's traditional adversary.⁸

The 'Quranic Concept of War' was conceived by General Zia-ul-Haq, and propagated an aggressive, escalating and relentless *jihad* against non-believers in the faith. Terrorism was justified through religious diktats as a means to achieve ultimate dominance. It further paved the way for the current employment of irregulars by asserting that *jihad* is not an exclusive domain of the professional soldier, nor is it restricted to the application of military force alone and, therefore, the nation's entire strength must be applied to achieve the laid down objectives.⁹ It propounds that war is to be waged against the non-believers in the name of Allah, with a spirit of religious duty and obligation. The *fidayeen* concept was further ordained by propagating that death and life after death are inevitable and those who die fighting for the cause of Allah are blessed and would be suitably rewarded in paradise.

The concept exhorts all believers to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies, stating that terror is not only a means, but an end in itself, which can be instilled only if the opponent's faith is destroyed. The thought process was formalised in a book in 1979, endorsed by, General Zia-ul-Haq, and was taught compulsorily to all Army officers.¹⁰ It contributed to the radicalisation and Islamisation of the Pakistan Army and fomented extreme anti-India fervour. In future wars, the 'Quranic Concept of War' could be the singular unifying factor for *jihadists* to unite with the Pakistan armed forces against India. There is also a likelihood of propaganda regarding 'Islam in Danger' being used for indoctrination, urging all 'true' Muslims to take up arms against non-believers. This further cemented the role of sub-conventional or hybrid warfare against India.

The military strategy of Pakistan has always been anti-India and Kashmir-centric, avoiding conventional war but achieving its aims through sub-conventional means. It has fomented proxy war in Kashmir while ensuring that its activities remain below the threshold of a conventional conflict. Its strategy of using the nuclear threat is again a form of mixing conventional, sub-conventional and nuclear capabilities against India. The current situation in J&K post revocation of Article 370, with communication shut down, and concerted and coordinated actions by the security forces has been tense but stable, and Pakistan, in spite of its best efforts, has not been able to create an adverse situation. It is likely that Pakistan, will now attempt to use all its hybrid capabilities to exploit the situation for its political and military gains.¹¹

Pakistan's hybrid warfare strategy has been conceptualised to function as an instrument of state/military policy and is designed as a force multiplier to exploit the strategic divide between India and Pakistan. It intends to enhance its force capability on the outbreak of hostilities. The hybrid warfare launched by Pakistan is likely to be multi-pronged with the likely aims to be as under:

- To mitigate its conventional shortcomings and keep the Indian armed forces engaged in sub-conventional operations, and retain the ability to calibrate relations.
- To further the divide and create mistrust between the Kashmiris and the Indian government by conducting sensational strikes on sensitive targets and instigating unrest.
- To create situations in the Valley to draw international attention and take the issue to international forums. It may also use this to draw attention away from its internal financial, cultural and social instability.
- To delay and disrupt Indian military operations to adversely impact India's war-waging machinery.

Pakistan's hybrid war against India has multiple dimensions which apart from focussing on J&K, have spread all across the country, with multiple sleeper cells, funding of radical organisations, cyber warfare, targeting through social media, paid domestic and international media and attempts to make inroads towards India from other neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh.¹² Pakistan has established a well oiled and coordinated system of terror funding in J&K and other parts of India, including the metros like Mumbai. The impact of these networks has been witnessed in various bomb blasts across the nation, and the situation in J&K is the result of this elaborate terror funding network.

Enablers for Hybrid Warfare by Pakistan

Historical factors like partition post-independence, claim to J&K and subsequent creation of Bangladesh from East Pakistan are the biggest psychological and political reasons for Pakistan to continue the conflict with India.¹³ The LoC, unlike a well defined International Boundary (IB), has its own peculiarities, being not clearly demarcated and the terrain providing an opportunity for infiltration by terrorists in spite of the best efforts by the security forces. The civil population i.e, the demography with its quantum and characteristics as well as its location close to the LoC, provides the opportunity for hybrid threats.

The overall force asymmetry and unfavourable force ratios in the case of an all out conventional conflict is likely to put Pakistan in an obvious disadvantage against India. This has prompted the adversary to rely heavily upon irregulars and other hybrid resources to keep the Indian forces engaged in sub-conventional conflict on multiple fronts. One of the major enablers is the centralised power centre in terms of the Pakistan Army, which controls all the intelligence and military assets, along with access to funds. Pakistan has, over time, evolved its strategy and added multiple dimensions to its hybrid threat, which include use of the social media and fake news propaganda.¹⁴

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) plays a pivotal role as the coordinating agency in waging hybrid war against India. Its coordinated actions with the Inter-Services Public Relations Department (ISPR) of the Pakistan Army, through various wings and special cells, focus on propaganda for the domestic population, the Kashmiris and the international audience. This well oiled machinery, with adequate access to power centres and funds, acts as great enabler in conducting targeted hybrid warfare for conventional and sub-conventional operations during both war and peace.

The China-Pakistan collusion provides Pakistan access to Chinese capabilities in cyber, military, space and economic warfare. The information warfare capabilities of China provide back-end support to Pakistan and facilitate the launch of hybrid threats against India.¹⁵ The human intelligence network of Pakistan, coupled with technological support from China, poses a serious hybrid threat to India and needs to be countered with a well devised and executed strategy. The availability of adequate expertise to exploit the social media and favourable print/visual media facilitates influencing the population and fomenting trouble.¹⁶

Hybrid Warfare During Conventional Operations

If war is inevitable or a suitable opportunity presents itself in the form of an adverse internal situation in Kashmir, Pakistan may exploit it to fight a conventional war limited to J&K or across the entire front. The nuclear card may also be leveraged deftly during all stages of the conflict to restrict India by using international pressure.¹⁷ In the past, Pakistan has employed sub-conventional warfare as an adjunct to conventional war¹⁸. The appreciated contours of using hybrid warfare could involve building up local capability, while ensuring a high degree of non-attributability and then imperceptibly increasing the intensity of sub-conventional warfare, testing India's 'threshold of tolerance' and shaping opinions in the chosen theatre of operations. However, in future hybrid wars, the

main effort could be sub-conventional, with an aim to ‘heat the iron’ while a conventional ‘hammer’ may be employed at an appropriate time to strike the ‘iron’ and conclude the short and localised campaign on a winning note.

Pakistan has a terror factory that produces terrorists for export to India, Afghanistan and across the globe.¹⁹ This bench strength of approximately 1,600-1,800 terrorists will be used by Pakistan in conjunction with the regular conventional forces, along both the border and in the hinterland to degrade Indian military capabilities.²⁰ The focus could be to foster unrest, communal riots, target logistics echelons, enhance the strength of commando troops in various operations and carry out sabotage missions.²¹

Measures to Counter Pakistan’s Hybrid War

Multi-pronged, multi-dimensional and coordinated actions at the national and multi-agency levels are required to counter Pakistan’s hybrid threat. A coordinated strategy, planned and executed by the Indian government post abrogation of Article 370 has ensured that most of the hybrid assets of Pakistan have been isolated and countered. The current situation on the ground post revocation of Article 370 has left Pakistan frustrated, due to its inability to calibrate and initiate actions along the LoC and Kashmir Valley. This was achieved by targeting the over-ground workers and denying communication links, along with financial freedom. However, Pakistan continued its cyber and social media warfare by spreading propaganda via fake media news through international and domestic media houses.²²

The counter to any enemy threat needs to be planned and executed in the same domain by using better defensive and offensive capabilities. The first step in countering any threat is to understand the threat and ensure that all the agencies and individuals handling various dimensions of this versatile threat understand the dimensions and future developments in this form of warfare. Hybrid threats, thus, need to be countered

holistically, using all capabilities in the cyber, space, financial, diplomatic and military fields. The need of the hour is to create a central command and control organisation coordinating a multi-dimensional response to multiple threats to ensure a synergised and coordinated strategic response. Coordination in all these diverse fields can be achieved only by a centralised command and control organisation under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), whose primary function could be to coordinate actions by various sister agencies. The expertise of various branches of the security forces and civil agencies needs to be synergised towards the common goal of defeating the enemy's evil designs.

Conclusion

The casus belli between India and Pakistan is the state of J&K. The LoC provides Pakistan an ideal opportunity to launch a hybrid war with an aim to alter the status quo. Pakistan presently does, and will always, aim to create an anti-India feeling among the masses of Kashmir. The 'agitation dynamics', if handled ineptly by the civil administration and security forces, can present an opportunity for Pakistan to exploit. The proliferation of the internet and social media in the Kashmir Valley and other parts of the state adds another dimension to the already complicated issue. Most prominently, Pakistan has the *jihadi* terrorists whenever it wants to muster them. The threat from Pakistan is, therefore, real and our security architecture needs to be suitably designed to mitigate and face the nuances of the hybrid threats.

Notes

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